



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 21, 2012

Contact: Lisa Richardson, 213-361-6980

Email: lrichardson@bos.lacounty.gov

or

Contact: Sharita Moon, 213-974-2222

Email: smoon@bos.lacounty.gov

**Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas and Superintendent
Arturo Delgado visit Houston juvenile detention facilities to
examine successful models for reform**

Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas and Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) Superintendent Arturo Delgado visited classrooms in Houston, Texas' juvenile detention facilities Thursday (Feb.16) in an ongoing effort to study innovative programs that may be models for reforming education in Los Angeles' youth camps and halls.

Los Angeles County's youth probation system is currently being monitored by the U.S. Dept. of Justice due to dangerous conditions in the camps, and the county in 2010 settled a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union alleging the failure to provide a constitutionally adequate education to youths at the Challenger Camp in Lancaster. Under the settlement terms, LACOE and the Probation Dept. are now working to improve education at Challenger Camp.

Supervisor Ridley-Thomas, however, believes schooling in the county's youth probation facilities is in urgent need of an overhaul. "There are bright spots in our camps due to the above-and-beyond effort of many dedicated Probation and LACOE staffers; but as a whole our system needs to look and act more like a school system than a prison system," Ridley-Thomas said, "we have a long way to go."

In Houston, Delgado and Ridley-Thomas visited the Harris County Youth Village, where boys and girls in custody attend classes in a dedicated school building. Along with class sizes typically smaller than ten students, youths in custody are taught using contemporary technology – students use laptop computers in the classrooms and each room features a “smart board” multimedia blackboard.

More than 80% of students who take the GED high school equivalency exam in custody pass the test and move on to a local community college. The Youth Village also uses a computer-guided reading program being studied for use in Los Angeles County. Along with academic innovations, youths in custody participate in a student government that meets weekly to manage their residential life.

Supervisor Ridley-Thomas had previously visited the Maya Angelou Academy at New Beginnings, a revolutionary school program serving Washington, D.C.’s juveniles in custody.

Both the Harris County probation schools and Washington, D.C.’s probation schools teach students using the “Freedom Schools” model developed by the Children’s Defense Fund. Freedom Schools promote reading and self-esteem through an academically rigorous curriculum that also stresses civic engagement and social action. Outside of probation camps, Supervisor Ridley-Thomas has brought Freedom Schools summer programs to churches and community centers in the Second District, serving more than 500 students to date.

“The best practices in classrooms outside the locked gates of probation camps need to be brought inside,” Ridley-Thomas said. “A new LACOE superintendent, Arturo Delgado, and a new Chief Probation Officer, Jerry Powers, are on board, and they are eager to make the changes we need to make sure our youths use their time in custody to move ahead as students, not fall behind as prisoners,” he said.

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